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ABSTRACT

This informational booklet outlines the services available to New Jersey elementary school children in the area of basic skills development and offers suggestions as to how parents can support their child's educational development. The first part of the guide outlines the content, admissions criteria, and funding sources of New Jersey's Basic Skills Development Program. Next, guidelines are provided to assist parents in supporting and reinforcing the school's role. Included in the third part of the booklet are activities for developing basic skills in the following subject areas: oral communication, writing, reading, and mathematics. A list of suggested supplies to have in the home is provided. Concluding the booklet is a list of ways in which parents can become involved in the schools. (MN)

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BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

An Information Booklet For Parents

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Introduction

Of the many roles parents play in the lives of their children, the role of teacher is important. The lessons learned at home are the ones a child takes to school. And, the self-confidence developed at home will have a bearing on the success the child will have in school.

As children enter the formal or "school" part of their education, it is important that a partnership develops between school and home. That partnership includes (1) a need to know what school services are available, and (2) what the parents may do to support their child's educational development. Therefore, this booklet will:

- Respond to questions often raised by parents of students in basic skills improvement programs;
- List ways to support and reinforce the school's role;
- Offer suggestions for parent involvement in the schools;
- Identify supplies that will help the child learn away from school; and
- Describe at-home activities to help parents support their child's development of basic learning skills.

This booklet may be used as a resource for school personnel, a guide for parent or parent/teacher meetings, or as information to be distributed to parents and community groups.

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Basic Skills Improvement Program

What Is Basic Skills Improvement?

Basic Skills Improvement is a program for students who need extra help in learning basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

What Children Are Included in Basic Skills Improvement Programs?

Children who have been identified as having difficulty in making normal educational progress in basic skills are eligible for these special programs. Students from nonpublic schools may also receive basic skills improvement services when programs are planned with the local or area public school districts. In addition, institutions for neglected and delinquent children receive support for basic skills improvement.

All New Jersey students must be assessed in basic skills each year to determine which students are meeting state approved proficiency standards (N.J.A.C. 6:8-3.3). The results of these assessments are to be used in determining which students are in need of services in basic skills improvement. Districts may use the state's minimal level of proficiency (MLP) as the standard for selecting students or they may set a standard higher than the state's MLP.

What Funds Are Used for Basic Skills Improvement Programs?

The state receives money from the federal government based on (1) the 1980 census identification of children, ages 5-17, from families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); (2) the number of children in foster homes; and (3) the number of children in institutions for neglected and delinquent children.

The New Jersey legislature provides additional monies to support supplemental services and instruction for students who do not meet the state approved minimal levels of competency on basic skills tests.

Local district monies are used to provide regular basic skills instruction for all children in the district.

In addition, local resources are used to house and support the basic skills improvement program. Each year districts must apply for Basic Skills Improvement Program (BSIP) funds. Specific guidelines, established by the state and federal agencies, must be followed in completing these applications.

What Is the Role of the State Department of Education?

The State Department of Education is responsible for administering BSI programs in New Jersey. The Division of Compensatory/Bilingual Education and the county offices of education are the agencies responsible for approving district applications for BSIP funds. These agencies monitor the use of the funds and the services provided for students to see that programs meet all regulations and the needs of the students.

How May Parents Support and Reinforce the School's Role?

Opportunities for learning are best served when your child:

- Attends school regularly;
- Gets enough sleep;
- Receives enough to eat through meals at home or through school breakfast and lunch programs;
- Follows school rules;
- Does the assigned homework;
- Brings home and shares corrected work;
- Demonstrates respect for the school and staff;
- Knows you are interested in his or her progress and problems;
- Has a quiet place to study; and
- Is encouraged to feel that education is important.

A positive self-concept contributes to success. You can help your child by:

- Setting rules and guidelines in the home;
- Assigning tasks and responsibilities;
- Establishing routines;
- Giving praise for accomplishments;
- Spending time together;
- Doing things together;
- Encouraging attempts at new things;
- Providing a happy home environment;
- Showing and demonstrating affection;
- Disciplining when it is needed;
- Providing support when there is frustration and failure;
- Setting goals and standards that are realistic and attainable;
- Providing opportunities for success;
- Showing interest in academic work and school activities; and
- Discussing and solving personal problems together.

Activities for Developing the Basic Skills

The following activities in oral communication, reading, writing and mathematics are designed for parents to try with their children. Not all activities are appropriate for all children. Some activities can best be used with young children while others will be more effective with upper elementary, junior high or high school students.

It is important that parents carefully explain and demonstrate selected activities to their children. It may be helpful, in the beginning, to do an activity together. It is also important to be patient, calm and attentive.

Oral Communication

1. Hold conversations with your children.
   - — Give them your patient attention when they are telling you something. Look at them when they are speaking to you.
   - — Answer their questions in full sentences, speaking clearly, slowly and softly.
   - — Ask questions of them, such as:
     - What do you think I have in this pocketbook or this shopping bag?
     - Is the baby in this picture happy?
     - What makes you think that?
     - What did you watch on TV today?
     - Which is your favorite program, and why?
   - — Help them label things in and around your home, e.g. the furniture, food, clothing, the windows, walls, doors.
   - — Explain what you are doing when you are cooking, sewing, ironing, or performing some other action. For example:
     - I'm sweeping the floor.
     - I'm ironing your shirt or dress.
   - — Encourage them to verbalize their feelings.
   - — Spontaneously illustrate concepts when your children seem ready to understand them. Use real or miniature objects, or yourself or your children to do this. Some of the concepts that young children have difficulty understanding are:

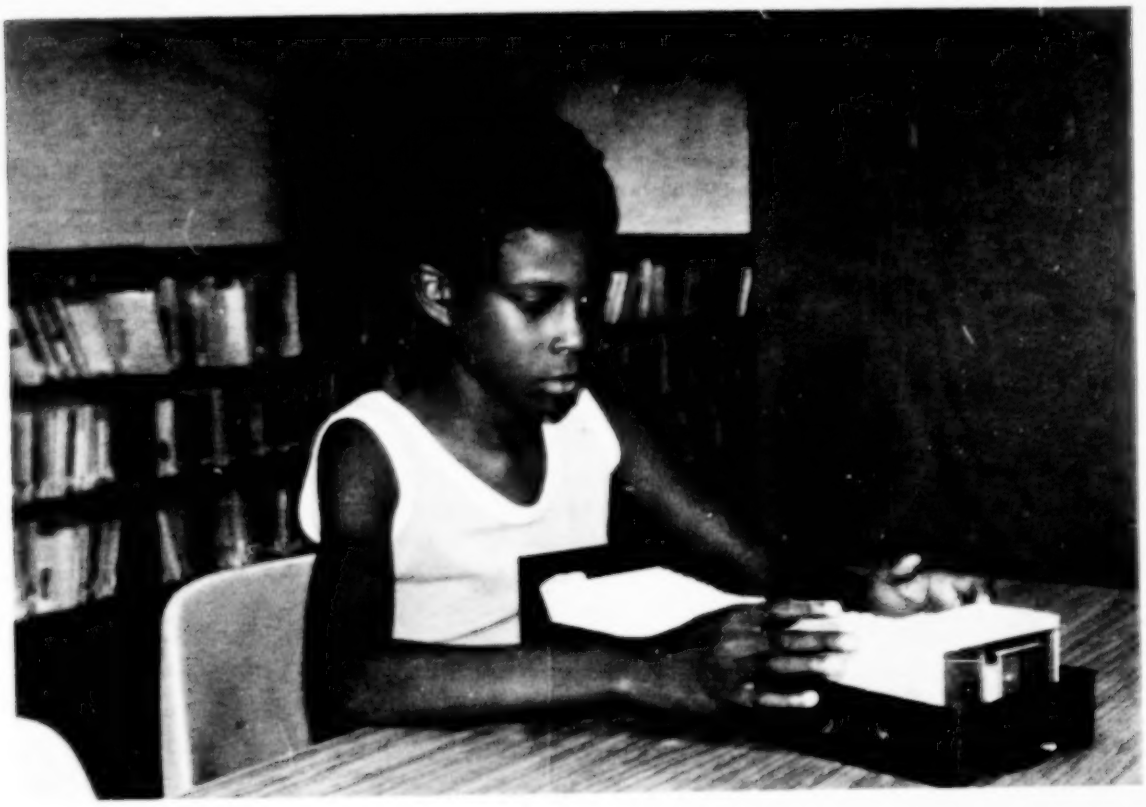
up/down	in/out
big/little	fast/slow
hot/cold	day/night
beginning/end	before/after

2. Encourage your children to talk about their problems, their interests, what they want to do and to be, what they do with their friends, school activities, and their successes/failures.

3. Play games such as twenty questions, charades, card games, Simon says, Scrabble, dominoes, checkers, and chess with your children. Sing songs, and read poems and stories to them.

4. Allow your children to finish what they have to say even if they have said something incorrectly. Just repeat the phrase correctly.

5. Tell familiar stories or nursery rhymes to your young children with some of the words changed. Your children can catch and correct the mistakes:
   - — Little girl blue come blow your drum; and
   - — Once upon a time there was a boy named Little Green Riding Hood.



6. Encourage your young children to dramatize nursery rhymes and stories they have heard and to role play everyday situations:
   - — Visiting the doctor, dentist, barber, grocery store;
   - — Going on a picnic, to a restaurant, on a train; and
   - — Washing the dishes, having a party, cleaning the house, going to school.

Writing

1. As soon as your children can tell you things, write their words or stories down. This helps children begin to understand that writing is speech or thoughts written down.

2. Place a chalkboard in your child's room or tape a large piece of paper on the wall for scribbling, drawing, or writing. Replace the paper when necessary. This activity encourages creativity, helps in fine motor development, and discourages writing on the walls.

3. Place a pad and pencil or chalkboard in the kitchen. Encourage children to write down telephone or other messages, such as where they are going and what school materials or food they need.

4. Give your children blank books and help them to write short stories, plays, the family history, directions, nursery rhymes, comic strips, and original fairy tales.

5. Make lists:
   - Most important things in your life;
   - Favorite movies:
   - Sports;
   - Songs;
   - Actors;
   - Foods you like and foods you dislike;
   - Things you would like to do, to be, to see, to have; and
   - What I have to do today.

6. Have your child rewrite your grocery list, classifying foods by categories so your shopping will be easier.

7. Encourage your child to dictate or write letters to friends and relatives.

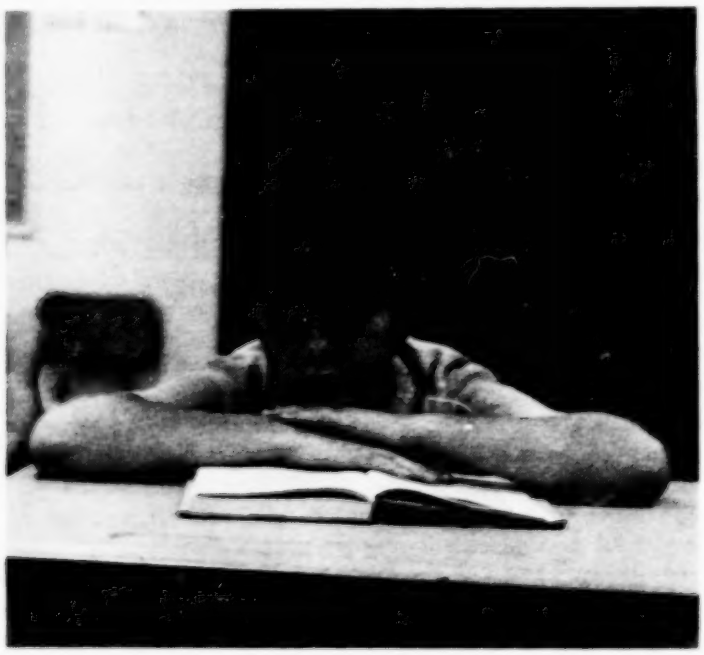
Reading

1. Talk to your children and listen to them. Tell them stories and read to them daily.

2. Help your children build their own collections of books. Books make excellent birthday and holiday presents.

3. Have your child cut out from a newspaper five words that start with a certain letter, paste the words in blank books, and draw a picture to go with each word. Continue with other letters.

4. Cut out comic strips from a newspaper or magazine. Cut the comic strips into frames. Mix up the pieces and have your children reassemble them in correct order.



5. After explaining the concept of a headline, have your child cut out headlines and paste them on paper. Have your child find a picture or draw a picture that matches the headline.

6. Have your children clip and classify coupons, and help you use them in shopping.

7. Let your child select a recipe and, following the directions, prepare the dish for the family.

8. When a new game is received, have your child study the directions for playing it and explain them to the rest of the family.

9. Have your child use the telephone book to practice alphabetical order by locating the addresses of people on your holiday card list.

10. Have your child use the grocery ads in the newspaper to help you plan your shopping.

11. Assist your children in learning the procedure for obtaining a driver's license. Get a booklet of driving regulations for them to study at home.

12. Read the newspaper classified ads to find prices on various car models, homes and apartments, and jobs that are available.

13. Write sentences and short stories leaving some words out. Have your child suggest or write words to complete the sentence or story.

14. Give oral and written directions for your child to follow. Have your child repeat them in correct order.

15. Begin a story and have your child tell or write an ending.

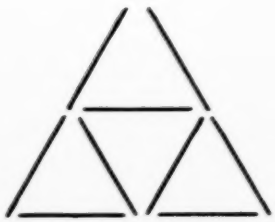
Mathematics

1. Make a meal with your child. Try to let your child do as much of the preparation as possible. The child will ask for assistance whenever it is needed. Help bring out the mathematical content of the activity by asking questions such as:
   - — How many sections do you think there are in this orange? Count them.
   - — We made 32 cookies. If we want to share them equally with everyone in the family, how many cookies should each get?
   - — If you cut each potato in 2 pieces and each of those pieces in two more pieces, how many pieces will you have?
   - — If we want to triple a recipe that calls for 1¾ cups of flour, how much flour will we need?

2. Mathematics can be used for grocery shopping.
   - — Together identify the items you want to buy. Write the items on a list. Ask your child to estimate the cost of each item. Compare the actual costs to the estimates. Compare the estimated total with the actual total.
   - — Take a calculator with you to the grocery store. Have your child keep a running tally of the items you choose. Compare the calculator total to the cash register total. Remember, some items are taxed.
   - — Help you child choose the best buy for a particular product by figuring out the unit cost for each package. Sometimes the unit cost is marked on the shelf.
   - — Have your child check the change you receive.
   - — Pick up a supermarket circular to use for math practice. Let your child use the prices in the circular to pick out the most (or least) items that can be bought for $2, $5, $10.

3. Use the newspaper to generate math activities.
   - *Help your child identify* charts and tables in the newspaper. Ask what information they can find in the charts.
   - Help your child compare prices of similar items at different stores and in different weeks.
   - Help your child make a shopping list by cutting out sale items and coupons from the grocery ads. Help him or her determine how much the items will cost.
   - Have your child place a small-mouthed drinking glass over a section of newspaper print and draw around the rim of the glass. Count the number of times each letter appears within the circle area. You may want to help your child make a tally chart.
   - Help your children read the TV section. Have them underline the shows they will watch each night and identify the times the shows begin and end. Help them figure out how long they plan to watch TV that day.

4. Find puzzles and problems to solve as a family. Talk about how you solve the problems. Ask each other questions to give hints.
   - — Make $1 using exactly 50 coins.
   - — How many different ways can you make change for a quarter?
   - — Make this figure with 9 toothpicks. For each problem, you must start with this same figure.



   - Remove 2 toothpicks and leave 3 triangles.
   - Remove 3 toothpicks and leave 1 triangle.
   - Remove 6 toothpicks and leave 1 triangle.
   - Remove 4 toothpicks and leave 2 triangles.
   - Remove 2 toothpicks and leave 2 triangles.

5. Involve your child in measurement activities using both standard and metric measurement.
   - — Have your child measure different parts of his or her body—the thumb, wrist, foot, length of leg from knee to toe, distance from top of head to tip of nose. Measure first in inches, then in centimeters. Make a chart of the measurements. Now try the same measurements on someone else in the family. How do they compare?
   - — Help your child rearrange furniture in the house. Measure the available space and the size of each piece of furniture (length and width). Make a scale drawing of different arrangements.
   - — Measure distances from one place in your home to another place, such as the distance from the living room to the kitchen.

Suggested Supplies to Have in the Home

- — Newspapers and magazines;
- — Dictionary and maps;
- — Lined and plain paper;
- — Pencils and pens;
- — Ruler which includes metric measurement;
- — Appropriate books for the ages and reading levels of your children; and
- — Thinking games and puzzles.

How Can Parents Become Involved in the Schools?

The community is encouraged to support and participate in all program efforts. To become an active participant in your child's school program, the following activities are suggested:

- Attend parent/teacher and parent/administrator conferences;
- Visit the school and classrooms;
- Attend school programs and activities;
- Attend meetings of the board of education;
- Become involved with the PTA/PTO;
- Become a parent volunteer;
- Become involved in advisory councils;
- Assist in classrooms and the library;
- Work on a school newsletter for parents;
- Volunteer to teach your native language;
- Share cultural and historical information about your ethnic heritage;
- Be an interpreter if you speak a language other than English;
- Participate in decision-making (school board meetings, various committees);
- Assist in the development of a resource book of people, places, businesses and groups that will help in schools;
- Share your talents in crafts, art, music, auto mechanics, carpentry, etc.;
- Share knowledge and experiences gained through travel, living in other countries and living in other parts of the United States;
- Work closely with teachers on your child's ISIP (Individual Student Improvement Plan);
- Help make instructional games for use at school or at home;
- Be a tutor, storyteller, or a reading listener; and
- Participate in fund-raising activities.